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The Names You Choose

Vanessa had wanted the luau, something extravagant—never mind that we were a moon away from our original budget. But that was Vanessa, always doubling down. She swam in mountain lakes; she was the only person I knew who'd been arrested for playing chicken. "We're in Maui," she said, letting geography make its case. "It'd be fun for the kids."

This wasn't all true, because our youngest, Chloe, dreamed of puréed bananas. She was barely a toddler. She'd never tasted salt, and bubble baths made her shriek. It was the other kid my wife had been alluding to, the child of our concern, our Anna.

Vanessa bought tickets to the luau. I was suggestible—there were so many things I was trying to save then, money the least precious among them. We returned to the cool of our room by three so we could shower and put calamine lotion on our burns, our sun-chapped faces. Vanessa took Chloe with her and got dressed in the bathroom, where she'd laid out various makeup cases and where the tub had jets, and I waited for Anna, who was twelve and who, when she was ready, spun for me in a white sundress lined in eyelet lace.

At the luau, we inched toward the entrance on the resort grounds, entertainers beating drums and offering drinks made with canned pineapple juice. Chloe sat on her mother's hip with her wild, straight-up ponytail and gave everyone her skeptical face, the one that prefaced an opinion you couldn't predict. "Drum," she said seriously, as if naming objects for the first time. "Drink." Anna had put on a dark hoodie, though it was still hot, and shuffled ahead of us all.

When we got to the ticket-takers, a shirtless dancer in a raffia skirt stood on one side of the line holding a dozen necklaces made of a brown nut—the kukui, he explained to the sunburnt man ahead of us—while a woman stood on the other side holding flower leis of white and yellow plumeria. One type for men, and one for the women.

They only paused for a second, but it was enough—the shared glances—and Anna tensed before me. We were still navigating these moments, when her crew cut

straight from Sport Clips and thick-framed glasses and Adam's apple were set against her polished nails, the eyelet lace. The cognitive dissonance of our own conditioning.

The woman, young and beautiful-haired, set a necklace of flowers over Anna's head and said that this was a pretty lei, for a pretty girl. Next to me, Vanessa let out a long exhale.

We'd been having trouble with Anna's name, the biggest trouble being Chloe, who wouldn't say it. She still called Anna by her old name—a dead name now, Anna had told us, because apparently a name was like a living thing in that it could also die. When Anna had revealed herself the month before—the identity, the name she'd chosen, all of it—Vanessa had said something along the lines of *stop it, don't you dare call it dead, my heart lives in that name*. But Anna had stayed rooted on the couch, knees under her chin. "It was my name to lose," she'd said.

This was before the psychiatrist and the pediatric endocrinologist, Vanessa trying to wrangle coverage from our shitty insurance provider, the injections to pause an unwanted puberty, the exam room chair that could weigh Anna while she sat scraping her heel against its metal base. Everything had started with the name.

Vanessa and I were trying. We were catching up in our different ways, new to so much, but Chloe was too young to pivot. We'd sat her on the living room floor one morning, with her older sister, and told her, "Anna, Anna, this is Anna," but she only laughed and thought we were playing a game. "That's A____," she said, pointing with a sliced grape and using Anna's old name, the dead one. "That's A____." She was in that stage of development where she was gaining the confidence to name the world. The week previous, I'd given her a cracker with a corner broken off, and she'd wailed at me and said, "No, bad dad." Vanessa later explained that Chloe had just learned a cracker was a thing with four corners, that it was a square. And who was I to change the definition of a cracker?

"Like Aristotle's taxonomy," I'd said, marveling at our little girl.

"Like what?"

"Nothing." I was thinking of all the infinite ways you could divide the world—vertebrates and invertebrates, things with four corners and things without, girls and boys—but that homespun classifications were, in their way, antithetical to the very idea of nature even if this was how much of science had been born.

At night, with our children sleeping in their rooms with their damp hair and their deep dreams, Vanessa and I fought. "No one knows who they are at

twelve," she said early on. This was the primary case she made. "This path, it would be so hard. Let's wait and see, and in a few years he'll be older and Chloe will, too. Everyone will have a chance to adjust to the idea if this is still what he wants to do, who he wants to be."

"Who she wants to be," I'd said.

One angry night, I accused Vanessa of using Chloe's confusion to shield her own uncovered bigotry, and she accused me of hiding behind an analytic brain that wouldn't consider emotional consequence. "This *is* about emotional consequence—Anna's," I'd said, hardly believing the words my wife was saying. "Chloe didn't even know what a name was a year ago. She'll adapt. She'll be fine." Vanessa had stared at me then, and it wasn't the right moment to notice, but she looked younger in the lamplight, the freckles of her arms peeking from under the kimono she'd borrowed from her sister years ago. She looked like we were in the midst of a date night, like this was a time for building arousal, although of course it was not.

"Wow," she'd said. "You don't know anything about early childhood development." And then she turned out the light.

Now, we stood on the edge of a vast lawn, the resort's grounds, with the ocean beyond and the setting sun farther still. Vacationers in linen milled about among jewelry stands and an area where people played a game with what looked like a hockey puck. Chloe had gone stiff-legged and pushed at Vanessa's shoulder until she'd put her down, and she was now toddling off toward the area where a whole pig roasted in the sandy ground.

"Do you think all of this is culturally authentic?" I asked Anna as we watched Vanessa chase after Chloe, her hair already falling out of a low twist at the base of her neck. It was like this more and more, Chloe with Vanessa and Anna with me.

Anna looked behind her, taking it in, the games and the merchants and the art station where red-cheeked children practiced weaving baskets out of banana leaves. "I don't know," she said. "I've never been here before."

When it was time to line up for the food, I looked for Vanessa among the tourists, scanning for her strawberry hair and her freckled skin. I'd recently begun wondering if she was sleeping with one of her fellow editors, Chad, back in our lives in Michigan. I knew she probably wasn't, but my brain wanted to make something sensical out of what we were becoming, and affairs are ugly but they do make sense. They fit in the marital taxonomy. I'd thought about using our family sharing plan to pull her phone's information from the

Cloud, but I knew that once I did that I'd be a husband you couldn't trust. I was still thinking about it.

I heaped poi and pig on my plate while Anna chose a roll next to me. Vanessa appeared before us then. From across a bin of mashed potatoes a few people back, she waved, snapping her tongs like a crab, Chloe at her hip. "Earth to Barry," she said. I was embarrassed by the bounty before us; I didn't know how to position myself as a tourist. I felt pale and bloated within the moment, a cultural vampire in my best polo shirt. But the food did look inviting, carefully laid out and appealingly labeled, and I resolved to try the poke.

Once we were seated, we talked with a family from Texas who shared our table. They worried about tariffs and raised pet snakes. "What kind of snakes?" Anna asked hopefully, and I asked if they'd ever set up shop somewhere like Maui and the mother said no, that snakes were as illegal as heroin on the Hawaiian Islands. They fawned over our toddler, and the family's teenaged daughter set Chloe on her lap and got her to try mahi-mahi when no one else could get her to do it. "Down," Chloe said when she was done, and she grabbed the girl's hand. The Texans' daughter was a plump girl with a broad face and denim halter top, and she led Chloe off to the nearby beach, toward the setting sun. I could feel Vanessa sit more erect next to me, her eyes trained on our baby heading toward the water.

"Don't worry," the Texan mother—Becca—said. "Joy's a veteran babysitter. She'll stay right with your girl."

Which girl? I wanted to say, on my second drink and feeling defensive. We have two. But Anna wasn't paying attention to any of us; she was building a volcano out of her mashed potatoes and spooning poi into the divot she'd made at the top.

"That's wasteful," Vanessa said, leaning over me. "We paid so much for this food." Anna wordlessly took her spoon and ate the top of the volcano in one big bite.

"Hey look," I pointed to her decimated pile of potato. "No more risk of eruption. Think of the natives you've saved."

Anna winced. "That's not the right word anymore."

But I knew that. I'd only forgotten.

"Kiddo," Vanessa said, addressing Anna. "Why don't you go and check on your sister?"

"Sure, kiddo, I will," Anna said. She pushed her chair back and hopped away before anyone could respond.

"They're lovely children," Becca said.

Then the talk turned to activities on Maui, and Becca mentioned that she was hiking up Mauna Kahalawai early the next morning. Her biceps were very defined, and I could see how she might be a hiker. There was a boardwalk, she explained, gesturing to the hulking emerald peak behind us. The overlook at Pu'u Kukui Preserve was supposed to be breathtaking.

"I won't be going," said Joe, the Texan dad, and something told me this was an interjection he made often. "Bad knees."

"I know what you mean," I said. I don't know why I said that, because I could still run marathons as long as I trained for them. My knees were fine.

"You should come with me," Becca said to Vanessa, all of us lubricated by our cocktails and the shared jovial experience of the luau. "Joy doesn't want to go, it's far too early for her. It's a hard hike, but . . ."

I knew right then that Vanessa would say yes even though we'd talked about heading to Ho'okipa Beach early in the morning, to set up and watch the surfers.

Meanwhile, Chloe had gone into the water after all. She'd wriggled free of Joy's hold and had made for the ocean straight away, but a wave had knocked her down and shoved her face into the sand, like a hand bent on malice. Joy had run up to tell us while Anna stayed with her sister, and for a second I could only focus on the great uneven splotches that appeared on Joy's cheeks, and I worried that this might be a source of embarrassment for her.

"They're down by the water," Joy said, gulping the air. "Chloe and the other kid. Everyone's fine, I swear." She looked like she might cry.

At the beach, Vanessa cradled Chloe, who was wet and drooling sand and furious at the ocean, while Anna stood nearby with the Texans and I took a call from Marcy, my assistant back in Michigan. "It's late there," I said, peering at my watch. I pictured what Marcy would look like, where she would be. At her kitchen counter, most likely, because she was an inventive chef. She could make food out of things I'd thought were just regular plants: hostas and dandelions and lamb's ears. She brought her lunch to our office, and sometimes it looked like she'd mowed her lawn and put the clippings into Tupperware.

I also pictured, although I wasn't proud, her long limbs and pregnant belly. I'd probably been thinking too much about Marcy lately.

"It's the Jensens," Marcy said.

We were remodeling a kitchen for the Jensens; they'd just approved the final designs. The theme they'd sought was, they said, not just any Versailles but Sun King Versailles. Cabinets like carved stone, possibly a ceiling mural of the heavens. Palatial. They could afford to be terrible clients, and so they were terrible

clients, asking too late about a second oven and suggesting a chandelier where the exhaust fan needed to go.

"Oof," I said. It was disorienting to think of the Jensens in that tropical air. I'd first gotten into remodels because I liked the story I could tell about it. I liked how all of architecture reinforced a big learning I'd hoped to pass on, even if I secretly worried that everyone knew this already, that if you dug deep enough, every subject bled into another. Rhetoric was politics which was argument which was math which was art which became, again, rhetoric. Take Aristotle. Grid paper becoming a canvas in essence, and in this way I could call myself an artist.

But that was in the beginning, when ideas came first before I had stacks of cabinet orders and a windows guy named Tim who permed his hair. Now, Marcy told me that the Jensens really did want that mural after all. And for a moment then my art felt like a mockery, its own opposite, as it sometimes did.

"With cherubs?" I asked.

"With cherubs," she said. "Do we know anyone?" I gave her a few names, though I doubted there'd be a Michelangelo among them. Marcy was crunching at something, I could hear—a sprout, maybe, or a thistle. When I'd told her about Anna, I'd used it as a way to make myself look brave and perhaps even to flirt. I could see that now, but at the time I thought I was only sharing a confidence. "Your daughter is a warrior," Marcy had said, putting a hand on her ball of an abdomen. "I can tell."

After I got off the phone, I joined the others in watching the sunset. Becca was taking pictures, and I resisted the urge to suggest she put her camera away, to let our sunset be what it was, a thing that passes and doesn't stay. Near the waterline, Joe reached down and picked up a piece of sea glass. He did it casually, as if the beach were littered with the stuff. It was a good one, too, so green, smoothed out and grown milky with salt and time.

Joe took a slow drink of his mai tai and said, "Look at this, now that's a pretty rock."

Anna, who'd mostly been quiet, said, "It's glass, actually." She had a hungry look, her interest leading her closer to us across the sand. She'd spent the past afternoon scouring the beach for just one piece of sea glass, and I knew she was wishing he'd offer it to her, that her knowledge would be rewarded, but Joe reached far back, and before anyone could stop him, he flipped his wrist and threw the glass so that it skimmed on the water for a moment before being swallowed by a wave.

"Huh. Ocean's not great for skipping rocks," he said.

"It wasn't a rock," I said. "My kid really likes that stuff." I was angry at

him for not listening to Anna, for not picking up on her wishes, for being dumb enough to think that rocks could skip on ocean waves. A nearby woman in a straw sunhat and oversized glasses glanced over, and the last of the sun ducked away from us behind the horizon.

"Shit," he said. "I'm sorry, buddy. I don't think sometimes." He raised his drink to Anna and said, "How about I go buy you something over there, to make up for it?" He gestured with his chin toward the vendors up by the stage, and I looked at his red and bulbous nose and knew then that he was pretty drunk.

"Oh, that's not necessary," Vanessa said. Chloe was now solemn and calm, wrapped in Vanessa's cardigan, her face peeking out from deep within her makeshift hood, which made her look like a tiny space villain. "How could you have known? It really looked like a regular rock."

"Rock," Chloe echoed, wiping her nose at her mother's side.

Someone somewhere blew a horn to signal that the luau show was about to begin.

The luau performance told the story of the Polynesian migration to the Hawaiian islands, of sailors setting out across the water in voyaging canoes in search of fertile dirt and forgiving terrain. I could feel Vanessa's eyes on me as a soloist in a hula skirt and flowered hipband shimmied in a move called the *ruru*, her hands doing a smooth ballet in the air while her midsection trembled with energy, hair barely swaying at her waist. It was mesmerizing and the kind of movement that probably invited comments from other male tourists, lots of "I wish my wife could do that"s and a dad face that projected a jokefied desire but not outright lust. Our own gendered performance. I felt my wife was daring me into the role, and I was drawn by those hips, yes, but more than that were the joyful whoops from the other female dancers, the impression of sisterhood, broad and open smiles that weren't at all like what I'd been raised to think of as sexually inviting, the dancers anchored by their own terms and not by what I perceived to be my need.

Next to me, Anna raised her own hands inches above her lap, subtly mimicking the dancer's hand movements, their fluidity and control. The mistress of ceremonies told the history of the hula, its evolution and transformation, from the ancient *kahiko* to more westernized *'auana*, its banning by Queen Ka'ahumanu in the 1800s under pressure from Protestant missionaries and its resurgence under Princess Lili'uokalani decades later. Stories suppressed, stories reborn. A chill blew in from the Pacific as the dancers performed, and Chloe

expression, the one that said, *what, I have to take care of this, too?* And then she was gone.

I wasn't sure what to do, if we had a security problem or if we'd have to be interviewed or what, so I put Chloe to bed and let Anna watch her tablet as long as she changed and brushed her teeth. She came out of the bathroom in clothes I hadn't seen for some time, flannel pants with tiny footballs on them, a shirt with a helmet decal on the front. Pajamas from the time before, looking so much like who she'd been that it threatened to undo me, considering what I'd had to drink. People used to say she was my miniature, and I doubted I'd hear that anymore. But she saw me looking and smiled. "I still like football," she said, and my heart broke a little then, knowing how much she was having to define for us, how much she'd still have to explain.

As Chloe drifted off, I sang her favorite song, a stupid thing about turnips, and once she was asleep, I whispered in her ear, "Chloe, dammit. Say the name."

By the time Vanessa got back to the room, it was nearly eleven. "I'm not staying here tonight," she said. What I learned was that the hotel wanted us to make a list of what we'd lost, that they wanted to reimburse us without involving the police, that that was how these things usually went unless something big was stolen, like a car or an identity. And all of this was fine, if anticlimactic from a justice perspective, but what Vanessa wouldn't accept was that the hotel couldn't get us into a new room until the following day, and somewhere along the walk from the front desk, she'd gotten the idea that she was being targeted, possibly stalked.

"I think they just took your stuff because it's the nicest," I said, unhelpfully.

In the end, we called Joe and Becca. After the luau, we'd exchanged numbers in preparation for the women's morning hike, and Joe had mentioned that they were staying in a two-bedroom condo not far from the resort. "It lets us all spread out a little," he'd said, finishing his last-call piña colada, and I knew from his tone that he meant he and Becca were having vacation sex.

I didn't want to stay with Joe and Becca. I didn't understand how a condo with strangers was preferable to our dark room with its newly reprogrammed card key. But Vanessa was on a course.

We piled the kids into our rented minivan, Chloe like wet cement and Anna grim. From my passenger seat, I programmed the GPS to take us to Joe and Becca's condo. "Old Stuart Road," I said, just to say something. "Which one is old, Stuart or the road?"

"Listen," Vanessa said, putting the keys in the ignition and pressing her forehead against the steering wheel. Outside, we could hear the waves slapping against the sand at the other end of the resort, and somehow that surprised me, that this was a thing that just happened all the time and never stopped. "I know what you're thinking."

"About the ocean?" I asked.

She looked up and put the van in reverse. "I know you think I'm being unreasonable," she said.

"Well, you're scared." A couple's counselor had once taught us that you could de-escalate a situation by focusing on the other person's feelings for a time.

"Yes, but it's also that I'm the one who has to make the decisions. You're a little bit drunk."

She was talking quietly, and the girls were in the last row way at the back of the van, but even so, I put my visor down and tried to catch their expressions, to see if they were listening, but it was too dark and I couldn't tell.

"That open bar really got me," I said. "Sorry."

Vanessa stopped at a light and rolled down her window, letting sea air flood into the car, a welcome thing. "It's fine. It's a luau, whatever. But having all this stuff taken, *my* stuff. It got me thinking." Her voice hummed with energy, whether it was the adrenaline of the night or something older, more pent-up, I couldn't tell. "More and more, I'm the house manager. Like with how Chloe was upset at the luau, and you took a work call instead of helping. That all this is my responsibility."

"Okay."

"It's not the person I am, at my core. And I'm an asshole if I struggle with it all, if I'm a person who also struggles?" She got very quiet then. "Like with A____."

"Anna," I said in a low tone, my blood stirring. I was getting a headache. I was having trouble reconciling the weight of this talk with its terrible timing, and my mouth felt like it'd been wiped out with a dish towel, and I was annoyed that I hadn't thought to grab one of the complimentary bottles of water from our room. I didn't know how to tell her that I wasn't going to be very good at a conversation right now, for so many reasons.

The light changed to green. "I'd die for them, Barry. But I don't have choices so much of the time." She paused while turning onto Old Stuart Road. "I execute other people's agendas. You know? I have friends who feel the same way." I knew that by friends she meant other women.

I didn't answer, because it seemed that in fact Vanessa had chosen this, that maybe she *was* a house manager at her core, that maybe my believing this was at the heart of our misunderstandings. But then a towering wall of beige

condos appeared before us. "Jeez, that was quick," Vanessa said, shaking off her words, and she began scanning the identical garage doors for number 462.

Joe opened the door like he was hosting an after-party, with a tumbler of whiskey and huge T-shirt over swim trunks, his feet bare and his daughter, Joy, spreading a fitted sheet onto the pullout bed in the living room.

"Welcome to Casa Henderson," he said, almost with glee. God. We hadn't even known their last name.

The place was clean but unremarkable, full of palm tree photos and wall-mounted surfboards and a tall, sloped ceiling that signaled that, yes, this was a vacation condo. Chloe, dazed, looked up at the ceiling fan, with its improbably long pole up to the top of the room, and burst into overtired tears.

"Drink?" Becca offered from the bar next to the kitchen.

"Bed," Vanessa and I said at the same time. "Thanks, though," I added.

There was some chitchat then, Vanessa recounting what had happened and Becca insisting that she was free to bow out of the morning hike but that it might be restorative, you never know. Joe asked me if I had everything we needed and I told him we did, that his generosity was very much appreciated, that we could easily make do on the living room bed. Even as I said it, my eyes scanned the bed—it was obviously too small for four—and then Joy said, looking toward Anna, "You could stay with me in my bed. It's a queen."

"Oh," Joe said, letting out air as if he'd been holding his breath. "That won't be necessary." I could see Joy start to protest—she was such a people-pleasing kid, I could tell—but Joe cut her off, and in that moment everyone in the room aside from Chloe knew why Joy wasn't going to be sharing a bed with Anna. "House rules are that we only have the couch bed to offer."

"I'm fine," Anna said, shaking her head quickly, as if to say, of course, how ridiculous to suggest otherwise. "I can sleep on those pillows." She pointed weakly at the pile of fern-patterned couch cushions someone had tossed into the corner of the room next to the entertainment center.

"I'm sorry," Joe said, not sorrily. "House rules. But hey, beats being burgled, right?"

We all agreed that it beat being burgled.

"I'm happy you called us," Becca said, taking Vanessa's hands in hers. "I'll start the coffee pot at five, and we can check in then?"

We said our goodnights to the Hendersons. I spread out the couch cushions next to the pullout bed, found an extra pillow in the front closet, and dug for my sweatshirt in case I got cold in the night. I lay down on the floor, the rest of the family on the bed. I knew the Texans were being charitable, that we'd asked

for a lot, and I could respect a house rule, but the luau night was supposed to have been the most special of all our vacation, and my firstborn was having such a damned hard time making the case for being who she was in this world, and my wife was communicating to me a mysterious sadness. I'd forgotten my toothbrush, and my teeth felt coated in sand.

"I bet Chad doesn't make you feel like the house manager," I whispered toward the ceiling fan once I was almost positive the kids were asleep, tossing my words up and seeing if they'd land. I knew Vanessa heard me when she immediately turned over, away from me and toward Chloe. But then she turned back.

"Barry," she whispered into the darkness. "You're off. You're way, way off. Now please go the fuck to sleep."

When I woke up the next morning, with a stiff neck, Vanessa was gone. Joe, no longer gleeful, sat at the dining room table with a bagel and a cup of coffee. He didn't have anything with him, not a phone or a newspaper, and I wondered what he had been doing with his eyes and his brain. He said, "Your lady's got her phone and says that Becca can drop her off anywhere after ten." I tried not to think what Becca had already learned about me by this point, what grievances might have been aired over the lookouts of Mauna Kahalawai. I pictured Becca taking my wife into a sympathetic hug with those defined biceps of hers. Gauging by Joe's hair and the new monotony in his voice, it was time for us to go. Joy, I assumed, was still asleep in her queen bed.

I roused Anna and Chloe as calmly as I could, jarred by how quickly their eyes flew open when I touched them, the space between when they stared blinking into the abyss and when they woke up enough to comprehend where they were. I promised them breakfast. I promised them a visit to our resort's gift shop. I promised the beach. And then we said our thank-yous, and we packed our things, and then we were gone from the Hendersons' lives.

I let them order whipped cream on their pancakes even though our own house rules forbade it and even though this was a cheap way to be the good dad. Later, at the gift shop, I sat Chloe at my hip and had a sudden stabbing sorrow at her heft, the expanse of her diapered bottom, at how much she was growing. I hadn't been holding Chloe much lately. I'd let myself fall into loving one of my children a tiny bit more than the other, or at least in a more complex way, and I wasn't sure whether to fight against that or if this was the natural order of being a parent of two. As if to pull me out of my thoughts, Chloe tugged at my hair and gave me a warning: "Beach."

"I remember," I said, laughing and walking her over to Anna.

We found her at a case filled with sea glass, pale yellow earrings and pendants in the coolest shade of blue, like ancient Antarctic ice. She was leaning over, careful not to touch the case, because that's the kind of kid she was, always knowing the effort another person might have to make on her behalf.

I knew as soon as I saw the necklace—its green glass so like what Joe had skipped away the night before—that I'd buy it even though the price tag made me swallow and even though this was the kind of rash decision that would leave Vanessa wondering. But it wasn't as if who I was had gone anywhere, not really, because as I broke out our credit card, my head swam with hope that Marcy had been able to find a painter for the Jensens' mural and that we would charge those assholes a fortune for it. Cherubs on the ceiling, children flying free—from within my hangover it seemed less ludicrous than it had, the simplicity of feeling joy in another's presence. I thought of Marcy, of Vanessa, of Anna.

The sea glass was encased by a long silver chain and setting, and I didn't wait until we were out of the gift shop before putting it on Anna, who was bright with happiness and embarrassment, right in front of the cashier and everything, the first necklace she'd ever owned. The green glinted in the sun bouncing off the shop's windows, and I distantly wondered if it had started as a bottle of Mellow Yellow decades ago, back when I drank them inside hot summers. For parental symmetry, I bought Chloe her own gift, a stuffed seahorse, and then we set out.

We ended at the beach as I'd promised the girls we would, and I texted Vanessa where we were. The morning was chilly for swimming, but a couple made their way across the horizon on paddleboards, and a group of tourists sat in an outrigger on the beach, obediently maneuvering their oars as directed by their guide before setting out onto the water.

They busied themselves in the sand, fighting when Chloe hoarded the cup and the shovel and the bucket, and clapping when Anna showed Chloe how to dig a moat. My girls, my sister-children, my daughters. My head still had a whirring chainsaw quality to it, though the pancakes and orange juice helped, and I joked that Dad was only to be consulted if one of them was being swallowed by a whale, though of course I watched them. I was right there with them; I watched them every minute.

And then, in some act of familial serendipity, two names were spoken at once, right at the same time.

"Barry," Vanessa said, newly returned. She touched my shoulder as she said it, not wanting to startle me, and it was such a small gesture, but it was one I later thought a lot about, the delicacy of that touch, how we might still alter our own taxonomies.

But I didn't think all of this until later, because I was distracted, because it was the other name I'd heard.

"Anna," Chloe said. She took wet sand in her fist and pointed at her freshly dug moat. She was holding something in her other hand, a thing that glinted, waving, and in a moment we'd rush toward her, to make sure it wasn't real glass, the dangerous kind. But for that one second we let her wave, we let her face cast its delight. "Anna," she said again, "Anna, Anna, come look, come see."